

BLACK MEN: DENIAL AND ACCEPTANCE  
DURING THE CIVIL WAR, 1861-1863

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
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fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE


by

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## ABSTRACT

BLACK MEN: DENIAL AND ACCEPTANCE DURING THE CIVIL WAR 1861-1863 by LCDR  
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This study documents the struggle to overcome prejudice and discrimination by black men during the early portion of the Civil War, 1861-1863. This study's focus is on several factors that are crucial in the Lincoln administration's final decision to accept the Negro as a combat soldier.

The black man throughout the history of this nation fought and died in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and the Mexican War with distinction. His acceptance as anything other than a combat soldier, has marred his ability to progress beyond the ranks of a menial enlisted worker in the Army or a cabin boy within the Navy. The policy decisions of the Lincoln administration directly affected how the Negro would be used in the Civil War.

The thesis concludes that the overriding reason for the acceptance of blacks as combat soldiers was the need for manpower. The Negro went on to distinguish himself as a fighting combat soldier and would never be denied his place to fight for his country again. The conclusion includes suggestions and areas for further study.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
APPROVAL PAGE . . . . .	ii
ABSTRACT . . . . .	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	iv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Thesis Purpose . . . . .	4
Limitations and Delimitations . . . . .	5
Research Questions . . . . .	5
Thesis Organizations . . . . .	5
Endnotes . . . . .	7
2. BACKGROUND . . . . .	8
Endnotes . . . . .	19
3. THE ROAD TO ACCEPTANCE . . . . .	21
General Freemont and General Lane out West . . . . .	24
Contributions of Benjamin F. Butler . . . . .	25
Naval Contributions to the Cause . . . . .	30
General Hunter and Saxton in the Carolinas and below . .	32
Endnotes . . . . .	39
4. FEDERAL POLICY CONCERNING THE NEGRO . . . . .	42
Republicans Decide on Policy . . . . .	43
President Gathers Power through Policy . . . . .	45
Lincoln's resolve is tested . . . . .	49
The Party looks at the Negro . . . . .	51
Endnotes . . . . .	56
5. CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	58
Areas of Future Study . . . . .	63
Endnotes . . . . .	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	66
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST . . . . .	70

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Black men, when called upon have participated with distinction and honor in American conflicts since the Revolutionary War. Time and time again they have proved their worthiness in this country's wars. This thesis focuses on the initial denial and later acceptance of Black men into the Union army between the years of 1861-1863. Chapter One covers the purpose of the thesis, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations of the thesis, research questions to be answered, and finally the organization of the remainder of the thesis.

In 1861 Abraham Lincoln began the first year in his presidency. Rumors of an impending secession by some of the Southern states gave the new administration a lot to deal with in its opening year. Keeping the Union intact required the full attention of the Lincoln administration. The Northern region of the United States started to consider itself a non-slave holding region. The North, although not fully slave free, believed the remaining territories desiring or awaiting statehood should be formed in the same manner as it was.<sup>1</sup> Some Southern leaders at the time had commenced secession among some of its member states with the remainder of the states to secede by the end of the year. The election of Abraham Lincoln was adding an anti-slavery reputation to the Presidency.<sup>2</sup> The Southern secessionist believed that Lincoln's administration and Northern dissension would

eventually call for the demise of slavery in the South. The inability to settle their differences over the issue of slavery eventually led to war between the North and South.

Within days of the first shots on Fort Sumter, prominent Black individuals within the circles of Washington, D.C., and other northern states offered the voluntary services of free Negro citizens to fight. Jacob Dodson, a Black attendant of the Senate chamber offered the services of 300 reliable Black free citizens to guard the city from attack.<sup>3</sup> His offer was declined. A prominent Michigan doctor by the name of G. P. Miller wrote Secretary of War Simon Cameron to solicit the privilege of raising 5,000 to 10,000 freemen to report in 60 days and take up positions within the Army as sharpshooters.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Miller was referred to the Governor of the state of Michigan in handling the matter, which was normally the policy of the War Department at the time. It was apparent to Dr. Miller that currently this war was for whites only.<sup>5</sup>

The great abolitionist and spokesman Frederick Douglass commented on the fact that the nation had not yet seen the wisdom of calling on Black men to help in the Civil War. He stated:

The side which first summons the Negro to it's aid will open and will conquer. . . . the south will emancipate and arm his slaves sooner than submit to defeat. . . . the abolition of slavery is no longer a question. The only question left to be answered is, whether they or we shall abolish it on which side the four million Blacks shall fight whether they or we shall inscribe on our banner "Justice to the Negro" and under it advance to success.<sup>6</sup>

Other Negroes did not agree with the policy of free Blacks volunteering for the Union armed forces use. A Negro whose initials were R. H. V. preached inactivity with the call to fight by prominent

individuals, such as Frederick Douglass, Alfred M. Green, and Jacob Dodson, and editorials by the New York-based Anglo African newspaper. He stated:

No regiments of Black troops should leave their bodies to rot upon the battlefield beneath a Southern sun, to conquer a peace based upon the perpetuity of human bondage. . . . I claim that the raising of Black regiments for the war would be highly impolitic and uncalled for under the present state of affairs, knowing as we do, the policy of the Government in relation to colored men. . . . Is this country ready and anxious to initiate a new era for downtrodden humanity, that you know eagerly propose to make the sacrifice of thousands of our ablest men to encourage and facilitate the great work of segregation? No! no! Your answer must be NO!!! No Black regiment unless by circumstances over which we have no option, no control, no initiating war measures, to be adopted or encouraged by us. Our policy must be neutral, ever praying for the success of that party determined to initiate first the policy of justice and equal rights<sup>7</sup>

The Black Americans who were opposed to volunteering denied that an armed conflict would bring about any better treatment or achieve any real justice. Henry Copper, a Philadelphia native, stated on 4 May that he would never fight for the Union unless the government accepted Negro volunteers on the same basis as whites:

We, the members of the first and only equipped military company, have more knowledge of our duty, and also more dignity, than to offer our services to a Government, when knowing at the same time, that the laws call for none but the white men to do military duty. . . . I as the Captain, in behalf of the company, am resolved never to offer or give service, except it be on equality with all other men.<sup>8</sup>

These are but some of the views held by many Blacks prior to and during the initial stages of the Civil War. Many looked at this as an opportunity to achieve recognition and respect once and for all. Others looked at this as just another way they would be used by the white man to further his cause.

Once the fears and concerns of Negroes being armed were overlooked, the Black man went on to prove himself a formidable fighter and soldier in the Civil War, just as he had in previous conflicts for the Union.

Blacks had served in the Revolutionary conflict, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War. While their capacity was not that of a combat soldier, they nonetheless provided an integral cornerstone as laborers, cooks, and engineers.

By the end of the war it could easily be said that more than 200,000 served on the Union side. A more accurate total may be 186,000 but the record keeping was never that accurate. Losses among Negro soldiers were high: 68,178 from all causes were reported, or over one-third of the total enrolled. Of these 2,751 were killed in action; the balance died of wounds or disease or were missing.<sup>9</sup>

This thesis also focuses on the social issues, political climate, and policy concerning Black men's acceptance and entrance into the Armed forces of the Union between 1861-1863. It will finish with the final acceptance and service of Black men serving in the Union forces.

The history of the Black man's service during the Civil War was noteworthy. He fought with pride and distinction for a nation that had not fully accepted him or his abilities.

#### Thesis Purpose

This thesis details the political climate, moral convictions, and ethnic considerations that many people held both North and South, concerning Blacks' initial desires and later enrollment in



the Civil War. Its purpose is to use all available historical documents to record the details of that era.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. This thesis is limited because a great deal of information was either not recorded or lost, due to the very nature of our society at the time.

Delimitations. While this paper will focus itself on a certain period, it will undoubtedly have to take into consideration events and places outside of its focus in order to bring the full topic to light. Also, there have been other theses and dissertations dealing with this topic area.

#### Research Questions

1. What were the social, political, and military reasons Black men could not fight as combat soldiers in the Civil War between 1861 and 1863?

2. What were the reasons behind the final admittance and enrollment of Black men in 1863?

#### Thesis Organization

Chapter Two contains background information that will deal with social and political issues leading up to admitting black men to serve as soldiers during the Civil War. Chapter Three covers the issues that led to the final enrollment of Black men as combat soldiers serving

in the Civil War. Chapter Four explores the policy of the federal government and the effect it had on the enrollment of Negro troops. Chapter Five contains the conclusions and suggestions of areas of future study.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>James M. Mcpherson, The Negro's Civil War (New York: Random House Pantheon Book, 1965), 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>3</sup>Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm; Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>7</sup>McPherson, 31-32.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>9</sup>Cornish, 288.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BACKGROUND

In 1837 John C. Calhoun made his famous defense of slavery before the Senate of the United States and showed how important racial doctrines were in the new and militant defense of slaves which developed in the 1830s:

I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding states between the two, is instead of an evil, a good - - a positive good.<sup>1</sup>

These words and sentiments, uttered almost 158 years ago, may have been a part of the thought process and treatment about Blacks during that era. However, thirty years later with a changing society and a difference of opinion, the nation moves towards war and a final outcome on the issue of armed Negro soldiers.

The denial of Blacks to serve in the early years of the American Civil War, both North and South, was part of an ongoing debate of major concern for thousands of Black people who considered military service a great opportunity for recognition and possible equal justice.

Blacks, Negroes, and or "Darkies" as they were commonly called, have always faced discrimination, prejudice, and ignorance. They were treated with sincere care if needed, but also squandered and cast aside if not. Depending on the mood of the master, a Black person could just

as easily be kicked or thrown much like a domestic animal, if one was not pleased with that individual's performance.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the domestic animal, the Black in many cases was treated far more cruelly, probably out of ignorance, but more often because it was the way to either discipline or let the slave know who was in charge. Additionally, the Black man was perceived to have evolved from the ape, and therefore, was incapable of higher mental capacity. The color of his skin and the texture of his hair were both different from the white man and contributed heavily to his nonacceptance into the white mainstream. The white man, on the other hand, evolved from Adam and Eve and was considered the superior of the two.

Europeans, especially the Portuguese and Dutch, were able to engage in the slave trade due to the many tribal wars fought in the Central African and Western areas. The victories from the winning tribes resulted in the agony and long-term anguish and depravation of slavery as we know today.<sup>3</sup>

The history of the Black soldier remains an undocumented and obscure part of history. There are many reasons why the subject has not been well documented or written about during that particular time frame.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, Blacks have served in many wars for this country. They have served not as combat soldiers, but as laborers, cooks, commissarymen, and engineers to sustain the white soldier in the field. From this there have been half-baked misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misinformation concerning his role.<sup>5</sup> In large part the Black man is not to blame for this problem, although he is part of it. The military and civilians leaders, Congressman, cabinet officers, Senators,

reporters, writers, industry men, regular and volunteer soldiers, abolitionists, and just plain people all contributed to the climate of how the Black man was perceived in society.<sup>6</sup>

Early in the war, the North and South were both terrified at the prospect that the other was arming with Black troops. At the time this idea horrified the North, due to the fact that they thought the idea of an armed Black rebel was in direct contrast for what they were fighting. In many of the soldiers' minds they concluded they were fighting for the freedom of the Negro, not to have him turn around and fight side by side with the white man. They were the righteous ones and the Negro was the docile lamb they were to protect, not the other way around. The South, on the other hand, looked at this with a scornful disgust. The idea of armed northern Blacks tearing through their Southern heartland, raping their white women, and upsetting their ante-bellum way of life was even more devastating.<sup>7</sup>

Major General David Hunter tried unsuccessfully in the opening days of the war to arm a Black regiment in and around the coastal islands of South Carolina. He drilled, fed, and trained them in the art of fighting, hoping the North would embrace them as a fighting force.<sup>8</sup> It was not to be. Many of the same Northerners who advocated abolition were not quite ready for the idea of arming Blacks. They would abstain from the idea at that time, but not abolition as a goal. The very notion of a weapon of war in the hands of someone whom they considered "savages" was a bad idea whose time had not yet arrived. The New York Times had even stated that enrolling Negro soldiers could "mean nothing else than a determination to exterminate the white population" of the

South.<sup>9</sup> Others saw this idea of arming Black troops as eventually leading to the idea of Black troops commanding white troops.<sup>10</sup>

The South recognized this early and never gave the thought of arming Blacks any real consideration. Soldiering in their eyes was a revered occupation not to be trivialized by the arming of slaves.<sup>11</sup> Even though many Northerners regarded enslavement as cruel and inhumane, it was another thing to ask them to fight and die in order to free slaves. In general, whites in the North were just as bad as those in the South, with the exception of being non-slave states. They themselves had little or no contact with Negroes, commonly referring to them as "niggers," "nigs," and or darkies; much as the Southern white did.<sup>12</sup> It is this strong and deeply rooted prejudice, in my opinion, that kept Blacks from advancing on both sides. The continued opposition to the enlistment of Black soldiers was a significant impediment. Many military officers felt that the Black race, because of its alleged inferiority, could only serve the war effort as laborers, quartermasters, commissarymen, and engineer department personnel, rather than in full uniform with weapons in hand.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign observers, especially British travelers and historians, were more alert than natives to racism in America. English journalist Charles Mackay described white antipathy toward Blacks stronger in the North than in the South.<sup>14</sup> How could this be? Was it not the abolitionists of the North that were disgusted with the idea of slavery or is there some deep underlying mystery to all of this? Further research found that few Northerners thought along the lines of the abolitionist. Many were indifferent or looked the other way on the

subject as a whole. Continued discussions in the Congress found that Charles Pinckey, a noted legislator from South Carolina, reminded everyone that Negroes were "created with less intellectual power than the whites . . . most probably intended to serve them and be the instruments of their civilization."<sup>15</sup> It appears that many people, North and South, felt this way.

From 1861 to 1863 Union officers also had opinions about the admitting of Blacks into the Union Army. Colonel John Cochrane of the 65th New York made a strong speech during the opening months of the war in which he took strong grounds for emancipation as a military necessity. He contended that it was the duty of the government to take the Negro by the hand, place in it a musket, and set him loose upon his master.<sup>16</sup> These were strong words at the time and were not the sentiments of most white Northerners. Lieutenant Charles Francis Adams, Jr., serving with the Massachusetts cavalry at Hilton Head, described the situation to his father in a letter in strong terms concerning Major General Hunter's decision to train slaves in South Carolina.

Our Ultra Friends, including General Hunter, seem to have gone crazy and they are doing the Blacks all the harm they can. General Hunter is so carried away by his idea of Negro regiments as, not only to flippant letters about his one to Secretary Stanton, but even to order their exemption from all fatigue duty; so that while our Northern soldiers work ten hours a day in loading and unloading ships, while the Blacks never leave their camp, but confine their attention to drill. There may be reasons for this, but it creates intense feeling here and even I cannot see the justice of it.<sup>17</sup>

From Lieutenant Adams' words, it must have been hard on the white soldiers socially as well as physically, to bear the brunt of the work, while the Black soldiers performed all the drills. A seemingly hard pill to swallow, taking in the fact that Blacks were the slaves.



President Abraham Lincoln also had misgivings about Blacks. In one of his debates with Senator Douglas in 1858 at Ottawa, he conceded that there was a "physical difference between the two races, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality." Mr. Lincoln did not want give the impression that he was a racist, on the contrary, but the attitude of Americans at that time prevented Mr. Lincoln from exposing what he calls his trump card on slavery. Lincoln concludes his speech by saying:

I agree with Judge Douglas, he is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the rights to eat bread without the leave of anybody else which his own hands earns, he is my equal and the equal of Douglas, and the equal of every living man.<sup>18</sup>

Congressmen for Black rights and decency at the time were powerful men in their own right. Many expressed their disappointment with sending Blacks to fight in a "white man's war." Conversely, there were many who felt the Black man had a right to fight for his independence.

The two true powers at the time of the Civil War were the Democratic and Republican Parties including a few remnants of the old Whig party. Northern Democrats believed that holding slaves was a part of God's humanity. They also believed in conditional equality and, therefore, only afforded the idea of limited civil and political rights for Blacks.<sup>19</sup> Within their beliefs in natural rights and republicanism, the Northern Democrats developed an intense racism based on three concepts of nineteenth century thought: the pseudo scientific view of Negroes as biologically inferior, the revision of Genesis that denied the single creation of men, and a Americanized version of Edmund Burke's conservatism that emphasized continuity and experience over abstract theory.<sup>20</sup> But within the party there were many variations in party

opinion concerning the three principles of thought. For instance not all agreed with Jon Von Evrie, the New York physician and Democratic pamphleteer, who wrote, "It is a palpable and unavoidable fact that Negroes are a different species."<sup>21</sup> Von Evrie based his thought on a new science called ethnology to back up his claim along with his transformation and revision of the Old Testament to buttress his argument that Negroes were inferior to whites and of separate creation.<sup>22</sup>

There were other implications to the Democratic theory of racial hierarchies. If Blacks were indeed inferior to whites by virtue of a separate creation, then they must be governed differently also. Stephen Douglass expressed this himself in speeches throughout the Union and with Lincoln. Although much of the party advocated racism, it was not what the party was truly all about. Stephen Douglass did not view slavery as a malevolent institution violating human rights, but as a set of diverse arrangements embedded in the nation's biracial culture. His own state of Illinois embodied this diversity.<sup>23</sup> He agreed with Chief Justice Taney that Congress should not control slavery and that sovereignty of the issue should set with the community or state.

In their efforts to justify slavery as a necessary system of race relations, the Northern proslavery theorists of the 1830s and 1840s developed an arsenal of arguments for Negro inferiority which they repeated *ad nauseam*. They heavily emphasized historical cases against the Black man based on his supposed failure to develop a civilized way of life in Africa. As portrayed in proslavery writings Africa was always and had been the scene of unmitigated savagery, cannibalism,

devil worship, and licentiousness.<sup>24</sup> Also advanced was an early form of the biological argument, based on real or imagined physiological and anatomical differences especially in cranial characteristics and facial angles--which allegedly explained mental and physical inferiority.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, he was unfit for freedom on his own.

The Republican Party as stated by Thomas Hamilton of the *Anglo-African*, a weekly newspaper founded in 1859 for Negroes in New York City, declared in March 1860 that:

The Republican Party . . . though with larger professions for humanity, is by far its more dangerous enemy. Under the guise of humanity, they do say many things-as, for example, they oppose the re-opening of the slave trade. . . . They oppose the progress of slavery in the territories, and would cry humanity to the world; but . . . their opposition to slavery means opposition to the Black man--nothing else. Where it is clearly in their power to do anything for the oppressed colored man, why then they are too nice, too conservative, to do it.<sup>26</sup>

Thomas Hamilton believed that the Negro had no hope from either of the parties. He believed the Black man must rely on himself, and the righteousness of his cause, and the advancement of just sentiments among the great masses of the people.<sup>27</sup>

In the North, the old talk of colonization of free Blacks had reared its ugly head. Even some die-hard abolitionists looked at it as some form of emancipation.<sup>28</sup> Northern Negroes were vehemently against this colonization effort. To them it was just another means of removing free Negroes from the country and continuing the bondage of those already in slavery. Black people believed just as other immigrants that this was their home. It was their birthplace and the birthplace of their ancestors before them.<sup>29</sup> After the colonization movement died down in popularity around 1831. Prominent abolitionist, such as William Lloyd Garrison, and their followers reprinted colonization journals and

tracts to show how cruel and unfair it was toward Black people. Much of this created some outcry from sympathizers of the colonization theory, but to no avail. The topic of colonization would come up again in 1861 by President Abraham Lincoln. He wanted to relieve the tension of Northern whites concerned about an influx of Negroes migrating into the North based on the effects of emancipation. He truly believed Blacks and whites could not live side by side. Actual efforts took place in Haiti and Liberia, but were unsuccessful. It did not matter, the abolitionists of the North were well on their way to improving life and liberty for Negroes in the North.<sup>30</sup>

Northern Republicans around the 1850s had also denounced slavery as a "relic of barbarism and pledged themselves to rid it from all federal territories."<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, most Republicans also denied any intentions to extend political rights to free Negroes and expressed their refusal at the idea of social intercourse with them. Full legal protection should be accorded both races, with the exception of the right to vote, sit on juries, or testify in cases involving whites.<sup>32</sup> It is no wonder it took the Negro so long to win his appeal to fight in the Civil War. Every step along the way was met with some form of defeat.

The Republican party, being relatively new, was placed at a great disadvantage by their lack of experience as a majority party and their lack of a leader to chart their course for them. The Civil War, secessionism, and the issue of slavery overtook them before they could remedy these defects. It demanded that they produce a formula to save the Union, and made this demand at a time when they had never even borne the responsibility of appointing a postmaster. They were yet a minority

party, not destined to assume office for three months. They had never been anything other than a minority party, skilled in opposition tactics, steeped in opposition psychology, unused to responsibility, and unaccustomed to the formulation of policy.

The Republicans were an unorganized conglomeration of opposition groups. Some of them had been loco focos, barnburners, and the Free-Soilers in previous political incarnations. Some were Anti-Nebraska Democrats, but the majority were the battered and shattered remnants of the Old Whig Party. They were in the undisciplined ranks which marched under the Republican banner, middlewater farmers who wanted a Homestead law, Pennsylvania iron mongers, hungering for a protective tariff' newly arrived immigrants, and old Know Nothings who wanted nothing to do with each other. The party was more certain on what it stood against: It was opposed to Stephen A. Douglas, James Buchanan, the Devil, and the Democrats.<sup>33</sup> As unprepared as they were to cope with the issues at hand, they clung to their nominal position as a minority group and shrank from taking affirmative action. Yet, the future belonged to them; and, consequently, they alone could wield the initiative.<sup>34</sup>

This handicap might have been overcome by a definitive and concise leader. But in the moment when an unexpected crisis and unfamiliar responsibility fell upon the Republican congressman, they found themselves with no experienced leader.<sup>35</sup> President-elect Lincoln was of course the new Commander-in-chief, but he had been silent for more than six months. Mr. Lincoln was in the eyes of many simply an ex-congressman from Illinois and now President-elect, because he had once ran against Douglas for Senator from Illinois in 1858 and because newspaper publisher Horace Greeley held a grudge against William H.

Seward, who was soon to be Secretary of State Seward. Mr. Lincoln and the Republican party did, however; move on and by trial and error set about returning this country on a straight course.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>George M. Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1971), 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup>Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1956), 3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., foreword.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., foreword.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph T. Glathaar, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>7</sup>Cornish, 7.

<sup>8</sup>Glathaar, 6.

<sup>9</sup>Cornish, 40.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Glathaar, 65.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>13</sup>Cornish, 59.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>18</sup>Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln 8 vols. and index (New Brunswick, NJ, 1975), 47.

<sup>19</sup>Jean H. Baker, Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid Nineteenth Century (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 177.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 177-178.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Frederickson, 49.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>James M. McPherson, The Negro's Civil War (New York: Pantheon Books of Random House, 1965), 4.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Leon F. Litwack, North of Slavery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 24.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>31</sup>David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 2.

<sup>32</sup>Litwack, 270.

<sup>33</sup>James A. Rawley, Lincoln and Civil War Politics (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1974), 27.

<sup>34</sup>Potter, 81.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE ROAD TO ACCEPTANCE

Negro soldiers fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. They were armed and had proven themselves worthy.<sup>1</sup> General Andrew Jackson himself stated:

Soldiers! From the shores of Mobile I collected you; I invited you to share in the perils and to divide the glory of your white countrymen. I expected much from you, for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading foe know that you could endure hunger and threat, and all the hardships of war. I know that you loved the land of your nativity, and that like, ourselves you had to defend all that is most dear to man; but you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to those qualities that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.<sup>2</sup>

The thoughts of men like General Andrew Jackson laid the early foundation for the future use of Negroes as soldiers during the Civil War. There is no denial that the attrition of white soldiers played a pivotal role in the acceptance of Negroes as soldiers, but the Negroes insistance on fighting for his own freedom was the overriding factor in his final enrollment.

Negroes saw the Civil War as a potential war for abolition well before President Lincoln.<sup>3</sup> They impressed upon the Lincoln administration their desires for freedom through lectures and speeches before the Congress. Additionally, Negroes who escaped from their Southern owners joined the ranks of Union Generals such as Ulysses S. Grant, John S. McClemons, James G. McPherson and Stephen A. Hurlburth, as they won victory after victory in their push towards Vicksburg, a pivotal western campaign.

Once the war started, Lincoln moved more slowly and reluctantly toward making it a war for emancipation than Black leaders, abolitionists, radical Republicans, and the slaves themselves wanted him to move.<sup>4</sup>

The question for the Union Army became what to do with the growing number of Negro troops starting to infiltrate their ranks. These events would prove to be turbulent and a key concern for the Lincoln administration. In the North public opinion began to gradually change toward the arming of Blacks. In the summer of 1862 Union forces suffered a series of military defeats. Mounting casualties, the returning of wounded veterans, the alarming increase in desertion, and the growing difficulty in recruiting led to a reassessment of the military value of emancipation of Black recruitment.<sup>5</sup>

There was still a considerable amount of opposition in the North to the enlistment of Black soldiers, but on 25 August 1862, the War Department nevertheless gave the okay to General Rufus Stanton, military governor of the South Carolina Sea Islands, to raise five regiments of Black troops on the island with white men as officers.<sup>6</sup>

On 22 August 1862 General Benjamin H. Butler published his General Order No. 63 calling on free Black militia of Louisiana to join in and enlist in the volunteer forces of the Union. This order specified that only the Black men who had previously been enrolled in the Louisiana militia of the Confederate state government could enroll. He was not quite ready to arm all slaves openly.<sup>7</sup>

The radicals or Jacobins as dubbed by President Lincoln's personal secretary John Hay, were the hard-liners of the newly formed Republican party in the early 1860s. Unlike the moderates of which Abraham Lincoln was a member, they were aggressive, implacable, and hated slavery with a bitter personal feeling.<sup>8</sup> They would hound Lincoln

and his administration on the issue of slavery from the outset of his presidency. They continually called for emancipation and the end of slavery. Unlike, many of the moderates the Jacobins welcomed the outbreak of war as the longed for opportunity to destroy slavery and to drive the "slave traders" from the national temple.<sup>9</sup>

On 22 September 1862 Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. It stated that all slaves in rebellion states would go free. Loyal slave states and any rebellion states returning to the Union before 1 January 1863 would be exempt from the terms of the document. Many thought this an ill-fated move, especially the Democrats, who used it in the 1862 Congressional election against the President. However, the President remained steadfast in his support of the document.

President Lincoln was still very slow and reluctant to fully implement the provisions of his promise. Lincoln revoked orders in the early stages of the war by General John C. Freemont and David Hunter from freeing slaves in their military districts.<sup>10</sup> The President repeatedly, placed the preservation of the Union above the death of Black slavery; even as late as 1862, when he wrote his famous letter to Horace Greeley, stating that "If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it."<sup>11</sup> Here is a perfect example of Mr. Lincoln's complete obsession with preserving the Union at all costs, even at the cost of continued Black slavery.

As General Grant, along with his corps commanders continued to sweep across the western areas and rack up victories, the slaves continued to join Union ranks. Initially, the slaves were denied the opportunity to serve as soldiers. General Grant could only employ them as teamsters, hospital attendants, and company cooks.<sup>12</sup> By employing the Negro troops in this manner, Grant was able to free his white soldiers to be primarily fighting soldiers, and relieve them of the

fatigue associated with labor other than fighting. Negroes flooded into the Union Army camps by the tens of thousands. The constant onslaught of abolitionist lobbying, and the growing concern of white soldiers dying in the field, put the pressure on the Lincoln administration to act. Before putting together the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, it was noted that the administration had the added pressure of previously approving Black enlistment in South Carolina, and Louisiana in October and November of 1862 respectively. This and the following factors detailed below, played on Mr. Lincoln's decision to follow through on the Emancipation Proclamation.

#### General Freemont and General Lane out West

General John C. Freemont and General James H. Lane provided some of the initial controversy surrounding the arming of Blacks early in the war. Freemont head of the War Department of the West established martial law on 30 August 1861. Under martial law the property, real and personal, of all persons in the state of Missouri who had taken up arms against the United States and who could have proven to have cooperated with enemies was to be confiscated for the public use and their slaves freed.<sup>13</sup> Lincoln eventually would have Freemont removed from command for what seemed to be an ill timed affair. His actions were applauded by the abolitionists who would use this against the President in their quest to get Blacks armed.

General James H. Lane in Kansas raised two Black regiments composed of fugitive slaves from Missouri and free Blacks from the North. His forces would fight in several engagements in Missouri and Kansas and dispel the rumor that Blacks would turn on the white populace and go about the countryside killing and pillaging.<sup>14</sup>

### Contributions of General Benjamin F. Butler

Brigadier General Benjamin F. Butler played a pivotal role in the late decision to finally allow the recruitment of Black troops to take place. General Butler played a practical and political role in decisions concerning his request for Black troops. He needed more troops at a time when Washington could give him nothing or had no way of sending additional troops.<sup>15</sup>

Butler's military problems really began in May of 1862 when Admiral David G. Farragut cleared the way for him to occupy the city of New Orleans. New Orleans was a very large city of some 170,000 people. Butler's army only numbered about 14,000 at the time. He knew that in order to hold the city of New Orleans in Union hands and press onward, he would have to recruit more personnel. General Butler immediately began to seek out those men loyal and willing to the Union cause.<sup>16</sup> General Butler had a delicate task in that New Orleans had a populace of equal numbers of white and Black residents. He had never encountered a situation of this magnitude before leaving his last post at Fort Monroe, Virginia. There he only had to worry about slaves who crossed over into Union lines as contrabands of war.

In March of 1862, Congress adopted a new policy prohibiting the military from returning escaped slaves to their masters. Military leaders could refuse fugitives food and shelter and prevent slaves from passing into military camps. The former meant that if escaped slaves were to hang around an encampment they could be barred food and provisions, with the hope being that they would return to their previous place of residence.<sup>17</sup>

General John W. Phelps, a crusading abolitionist who controlled the area above New Orleans and a subordinate to General Butler, presented another problem. A graduate of West Point and a strict

disciplinarian, he had a mind and will independent of his commander when it came to the issue of slavery. With his abolitionist background and his moral disregard for slavery, General Phelps began welcoming slaves with open arms. He announced that slavery was "a social evil which is opposed to moral law."<sup>18</sup>

General Butler had warned Phelps on the problems of interfering with the domestic affairs of others. Phelps recounted and drew up a long letter on the need for abolition in the area. I believe General Butler apparently was confused on this matter, based on his own upbringing and that which he enjoyed as a student in Waterville College, Maine. Why, he probably thought is Phelps so concerned about the welfare of a slave race? For Butler it seemed easier to take this matter to his chain of command.<sup>19</sup>

In the middle of June 1862 General Butler wrote Secretary of War Stanton and asked him for advice on the matter. Stanton submitted the letter to the President. By July General Butler had a response from Stanton, it stated that fugitive slaves coming into the Union lines should not be turned away. Those capable of working should be employed at reasonable wages, and should be provided with shelter.<sup>20</sup> Butler was distraught over the answer he received from the Lincoln administration. He was unsure if the administration knew the full breathe of the local feeling on the issue of slavery and the impact it would have on the local people to see former slaves and freedman fighting alongside whites.

Butler was also concerned about the precedent his Army and staff would be setting. It was one thing to receive fleeing slaves into their camp but to send a message encouraging them to flee their masters was another.<sup>21</sup> Convinced Washington did not have the full picture, Butler sent one of his generals, who had been invested as Louisiana's military

governor. He also sent a prominent local citizen, and former attorney general of the state who had been a holdout against secession in the Louisiana convention.<sup>22</sup> At the same time Phelps requested arms and clothing from Butler to arm "3 regiments of Africans," that he decided to raise. Phelps further stated that which the climate and all, disease was taking its toll on his white troops and that he needed these men to replace them. Already he had organized over three hundred men and prepared for more. Phelps believed that the Africans needed to be supported in what he called the "The Temple of Freedom."<sup>23</sup> Phelps actions were unclear. If encouraging slaves to flee their masters would complement the issue, then arming them would surely be inviting trouble.

Although he was furious at Phelps, General Butler decided to side step the issue and give another order to Phelps to fell trees between his flank and Lake Pontchartran, to open a field of fire for gunboats and in constructing an abatis. This was not just something to give Phelps to do, but an actual task needed to be undertaken. It appears that General Phelps was not amused and submitted his resignation the very next day.<sup>24</sup>

General Butler did not explode over the issue, he regarded Phelps as an old friend. He sent letters to Phelps, one official and one personal. In the letter Butler tried to point that only the President had the authority to arm Blacks. The arms he had recently received were explicitly for white soldiers. Thus he would not make soldiers of the Blacks. He also pointed out that tree cutting and abating were needed. So to employ Blacks would not be slavery, because soldiers of the Army of the Potomac had done the same a year earlier. "Are Negroes any better than they?" asked Butler.<sup>25</sup> Phelps fired off another letter to Butler, stating he would comply with the order. He sent his formal resignation to be forwarded to the Inspector General.

Butler sent back a reply to Phelps first letter. He stated it was being forwarded to the President and further demanded that the Blacks carry out the work he previously ordered. Phelps sent another letter the next day stating he would carry out the routine duties temporarily pending action on his resignation. He also would not continue his service unless a series of proposals were sent to the President. These proposals asked for the abolition of slavery and the arming of Blacks to fight for their freedom.<sup>26</sup>

Phelps proposals were never approved by the President and his resignation was accepted allowing him to leave the service by mid September. Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy even caught wind of Phelps decision to try and arm slaves and immediately called him and General Hunter of South Carolina fame, outlaws for wanting to arm slaves "for military service against their masters."<sup>27</sup>

The Phelps controversy came to a head at the most inopportune time for Butler. The Vicksburg campaign had to be temporarily abandoned due to the fact Union Forces to the North could not give adequate assistance. Secondly, sickness and disease had taken the lives of many of his soldiers in addition to an attack by Confederate General John C. Breckinridge on 5 August 1862. Although the attack failed, it was nearly a success, due to the fact the Ironclad Arkansas had broken down, thereby freeing Union gunboats to employ their weapons.<sup>28</sup>

General Butler's new concern were his intelligence reports that the Confederacy was planning to take back the city of New Orleans. Quickly, he drew his troops back from Baton Rouge to take defense inside the city of New Orleans. With the Confederates delaying their attack until additional Ironclads could be built, Butler knew he had to gather additional troops. Already he had been informed by General-in-Chief George Halleck and his own military governor that reinforcements for the



present were out of the question.<sup>29</sup> So what was General Butler to do? After surveying his needs following the Baton Rouge battle he turned his attention toward a body of Blacks known as the "Regiment of Native Guards" which was part of the State militia of Louisiana. This group was first formed in the War of 1812 to assist General Andrew Jackson to defeat the British at New Orleans. It was disbanded and officially ended by the state militia law of 1834 after many years of controversy and disinterest.<sup>30</sup> With the outbreak of the Civil War the Blacks in the area would again offer their services to the State. In November of 1861 Governor Thomas O. Moore began their enrollment in the State militia. Over 1500 joined up. When the Confederates evacuated the city, the black militia remained behind.

After Butler's occupation of the city Black militia officers called upon him to ascertain his wishes. He immediately dismissed the ideas, but stated later he was impressed with their appearance and manner.<sup>31</sup> Now Butler was at a crossroads to met the demands of the Union with limited resources, or worry about the insurrection of the slaves. He chose the former and set out to recruit the freedmen of the Louisiana state militia. After numerous letters back and forth to his wife and a letter from Secretary of Treasury Chase informing him of the tension in the South, Butler wrote Secretary of War Stanton, "I shall call on Africa to intervene, and I do not call in vain."<sup>32</sup> Many historians and critics have debated the issue that Butler only undertook the work started by Phelps to enroll Blacks as soldiers. In essence it can be said that Butler decided to arm the freedmen of Louisiana only because of the attention of his own troops due to disease and updated intelligence of a renewed attack on the city of New Orleans. Butler eventually raised three regiments of freedmen totaling over 3,000 men.

Butler said his plan to arm just the freedmen of Louisiana's militia did not disturb the delicate balance already present in Louisiana. It was far more acceptable to arm Black members of an established militia, than to arm slaves of the people whose loyalty to the Union Butler was seeking to promote.<sup>33</sup> This situation alone did not solely by itself pave the way for eventual acceptance and arming of Negroes, but it certainly was a stepping stone towards it.

#### Naval Contributions to the Cause

When the Civil War started there were many free Blacks in the Navy. The Navy apparently never adopted the rigid Jim Crow laws that the army followed. Because of a shortage of men during the war, the Navy encouraged Black men to enlist. In addition, to the fact that Blacks had traditionally found jobs in the maritime services, other forces led many to join the Navy during the Civil War. Since Blacks were not allowed to join the Army in a combat capacity until the latter part of 1862 and only then in selected regiments on a case by case basis, the Navy was the only way they could get involved in the war. Secondly, at the beginning of the war fugitive slaves flocked to the Navy in large numbers when they were refused by the Union Army.<sup>34</sup>

With the influx of fugitive slaves and free Blacks, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, adopted a regulation to compensate for the abundance of new labor. On 25 September 1861 he instituted a regulation regarding the enlistment of contraband:

The Department finds it necessary to adopt a regulation with respect to the large and increasing number of persons of color, commonly known as contraband, now subsisted at the navy yard and on board ships of war. These can neither be expelled from the service to which they have resorted, nor can they be maintained unemployed, and it is not proper that they be compelled to render necessary and regular services without a stated compensation. You are therefore authorized, when their services can be made useful, to enlist them for the naval service, under the same forms and regulations as apply to other enlistments. They will be allowed, however, no higher rating than "boys" at a compensation of \$10 per

month and one ration a day.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the war the Union Navy suffered from a chronic shortage of manpower because of several factors which were favorable to the Black man. First, enlistment in the Navy unlike that in the Army carried no bounty payment. Secondly, the draft also made men subject to the Army, but not the Navy. Service personnel in the Navy were not credited to their community or state draft quotas, which created a serious inhibition against states sending men to the Navy. Since Blacks did not receive bounties for Army enlistment and were not subject to the draft until the latter part of the war, these regulations adversely affected the willingness of whites to join the Navy but had no effect on the Blacks. These conditions therefore forced the Navy to encourage the enlistment of Blacks, and probably accounted partially for the relatively favorable conditions under which they served.<sup>36</sup>

The unique and inestimable value of the Black sailor to the Union Navy was his acquaintance with the enemy and the terrain. Information concerning the location, strength, disposition, movements and activities of the enemy both of land and naval forces was supplied to all echelons of the Union command. It is impossible to study the thousands of first hand reports from Naval Officers without concluding that the greatest single source of naval intelligence, particularly on a tactical level, for the Union government was the Black man. It may be asserted that these thousands of willing eager Black sailors who performed additional duties as scouts, spies, guides, pilots, and informers, available only to the Union forces, constituted a major source of superiority for the Union forces as opposed to their enemy.<sup>37</sup>

Favorable comments on the behavior of individuals or groups of Blacks are numerous. During a daring raid adventure in November 1862, the kidnapping of a postman with official mail destined for Charleston

was conducted by a white petty officer and three unnamed enlisted contrabands. Probably two of the most famous cases of daring and bravery were performed by two former slaves Robert Smalls and William Tillman. Smalls was credited with the capture of a prized Confederate ship called the *Planter*, which he turned over to Union lines. Tillman also captured a Confederate ship and handed it over to the Union. Both men beat heavy odds against them to succeed. Because of their courage and bravery both were exalted from the remainder of the war.<sup>38</sup> It is these acts of loyalty and courage which would led Lincoln in deciding to arm the Blacks of the Union army as he had done with the Navy.

General Hunter and Saxton  
in the Carolinas and below

General David Hunter, with the assistance of Rufus Saxton, played a pivotal role in the employment and later acceptance/recruitment of Negroes into the armed forces of the United States. General Hunter had recently relieved Commodore Samuel F. Dupont and Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman of the newly formed Department of the South, that included coastal islands along South Carolina, Georgia, and the Florida coast. Most notable of the islands was Port Royal, an island point between Charleston and Savannah. This point was needed to serve anchorage's for the Union's blockading fleet.<sup>39</sup> Hunter, an ambitious man by his own account, had more in mind for the Union cause. He envisioned taking back Fort Sumter within a year of its surrender to the Rebels. There was one problem with this goal. Hunter would need at least a division of men to undertake it. Where would he get that many personnel in such a short period of time? After Hunter arrived in the sea coastal islands of the Carolinas, he found that the Confederates had fled the area and the slaves remained behind. He saw this as a sure fire way to end his problem of manpower. He then had to convince the

Congress, Secretary of War, Treasury, and the President of the United States of the suitability of his plans.

Earlier on, General Thomas W. Sherman also had ideas about the plight of the Negroes. Sherman along with the Secretary of Treasury helped put together what is now known as the "Port Royal Experiment" or Gideon's Band. Edwin Pierce, a treasury agent responsible for abandoned property, came from up North with fifty-three people, including a dozen ladies, supported by private associations in the North to take on plantation management and the teaching of the Negroes and their children. It is said the progress was a success with busy communities loyal to the Union being developed.<sup>40</sup> It is here that Hunter saw the potential for the Negro to be a soldier. He immediately wrote Secretary of War Stanton requesting 50,000 muskets, and 50,000 pairs of scarlet pantaloons to distinguish them by.<sup>41</sup> Hunter never received a reply from Washington concerning the matter.

Hunter contacted local Hilton Head militia leaders to assess how many men were willing to side up with the Union. In all about 150 Negroes took up with the Union. Hunter considered this a success and continued his recruitment of Negroes early on into May of 1862. Retrospectively, it was not a success and worry about an attack from Savannah and Augusta only intensified his recruitment of Negroes. Even though treasury agent Edwin Pierce was cooperative in allowing the recruitment of former slaves it appears his resettling campaign with the Negro worked almost too well. Not one local Negro signed up for military service. The Negro had become accustomed to their new life and abhorred the restrictive and dangers of military life.<sup>42</sup> General Hunter was not defeated yet, he ordered his commanders in the field "to send immediately to these headquarters, under a guard, all able-bodied

Negroes capable of bearing arms."<sup>43</sup> On the same day he issued an additional order proclaiming the emancipation of all slaves in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, whether or not within Union lines. No one knows where Hunter got his authority to emancipate. Many thought he had gone mad. When the President found out about this, the order was quickly voided. At the time the issue of emancipation for slaves was a politically controversial issue. No matter how small it seemed it created explosive issues, especially in the House of Representatives of the border slave states.<sup>44</sup> Hunter had another remarkable event happen to him in addition to the enlistment of slaves in South Carolina and the coastal areas. Robert Smalls, a Negro slave, courageously made off with a Confederate dispatch boat and handed it over to Union naval forces in the area. The act gave Hunter much needed information concerning his planned attack on Charleston. Although the roundup of able bodied Negroes was hotly contested by treasury agent Pierce, Hunter nonetheless carried it out. He did keep his promise of keeping the men who were willing and releasing those who opposed this form of conscription. For those who stayed, they were captivated by Hunter's persuasive tongue and so began the regiment.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the red pantaloons arrived and the Negroes under Hunter's care were drilled daily. Otherwise, they worked on working parties, notably in loading and unloading vessels.<sup>46</sup> Up to that point Hunter might have interpreted President Lincoln's original orders to Sherman permitting the arming of Blacks in emergencies for defensive purposes only as a go ahead for him since he was faced with mounting forces on the enemy side and thinly stretched troops covering a large coastal area.<sup>47</sup> If this is the case, Hunter still had not yet reported his position of arming Negroes as Union soldiers to Washington.

Testifying in April 1862 before a congressional committee on the conduct of war, Rufus Saxton, former quartermaster under General Thomas W. Sherman explained the need for the continued cooperation and work being performed by the Negro there. Lincoln immediately promoted Saxton to the rank of Brigadier General and was ordered by Stanton to return there and see to the affairs of the blacks in the area. He was subject only to Hunter's general authority. But it appears that the Lincoln administration and the Congress were skeptical of Hunter and his ambition for the area. Before Saxton's arrival to the area, General Hunter had finally sent a report to the War Department on his regiment and the activities taken so far. Weeks earlier a member of the Kentucky delegation in the House of Representatives had demanded Stanton inform the House of whether Hunter had formed a Black regiment. If he had done so, under whose authority had the order been given.<sup>48</sup>

When Hunter's full report arrived into Washington, he explained his full position. Sarcastically, even arrogant at one point, Hunter said he had no regiment of "fugitive slaves." He did have a "fine regiment of persons whose late masters are 'fugitive rebels'" and they "are now one, and all, working with remarkable industry to place themselves in a position to go in full and effective pursuit of their fugacious and treacherous proprietors."<sup>49</sup>

All was not well with Hunter's troops as he had explained to Washington. The great mistake was making them drill as soldiers and not paying them as such. Desertion started to come into play and the worst of all the humiliation by their fellow white troops. All of this added to Hunter's pain and distraught of forming a Negro regiment.

On 11 July, Hunter asked again as he had previously on 3 April for approval to enlist Blacks. About a week later on 17 July, Congress adopted a statute to allow the President the authority to enlist Negroes

as laborers, or for any other military or naval service.<sup>50</sup> It appears all along that the President already had that authority; Blacks had been in military and naval service already as laborers, and as crewmen for some time now and there was presently no law outlawing the President from enlisting them as Black soldiers. Hence this statue did not enlarge President Lincoln's authority at all. Moreover, a congressional statue approval at that time did not ensure its endorsement, nor did it mean it would go over with the border states or lessen the prejudice already prevailing in the army. Stanton, because of the statue passed by Congress went ahead and presented Hunter's letter at a cabinet meeting. Stanton along with Secretary of State Willis H. Seward favored granting the request and no cabinet member opposed.<sup>51</sup> President Lincoln was opposed to the matter, in that he would not go along with arming slaves directly. His position was that he would go no farther than to allow local commanders "to arm for defensive purposes, slaves coming within their lines"<sup>52</sup> Hunter's official request to build on what he had started was denied. On 9 August 1862, Hunter disbanded the regiment, and with his leave of absence granted in late August he left his command. Hunter, I believe wanted out of his post, due to an inability to fulfill his dream of recapturing Fort Sumter and claiming glory for his work.

On the other hand Saxton had returned to Port Royal at the end of June, as directed by Lincoln. Hunter at the time was in the middle of his commitment in acquiring permission to enlist troops. Saxton was well received on his return, because of his earlier affiliation with Sherman and the people in that area. The first order of business for Saxton was dealing with hundreds of refugees from the islands evacuated by Hunter's Quartermaster's service. These individuals had been previously sent to reinforce an outpost in Virginia. Up to six



regiments were sent leaving maybe 13,000 behind.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, there were the problems of Confederate rebels and white Union troops raiding the plantation worked by "The Port Royal Experiment." To assist General Saxton in the area of security, General Hunter left behind a company of highly motivated and skilled men. This would prove useful when Saxton went to survey St. Simons island, part of the state of Florida. What he found was a Confederate stronghold and the men left behind by Hunter would be perfect for dealing with such a threat. Saxton also found out that Hunter had been ordered to ship out his only cavalry regiment to Virginia and that most of the Carolinas immediately beyond Port Royal would be abandoned.<sup>54</sup> Saxton wrote Stanton at once requesting "to enroll as laborers 5,000 able bodied men to be uniformed, armed, and officered by men to be men detailed from the Army."<sup>55</sup> It seems this request was well within the original interpretation of the original instructions to General Sherman. It did not hurt that General Saxton was well liked by Lincoln, but I believed that Saxton conveyed better the intent of what he wanted to accomplish without ruffling the feathers of his superiors. On 25 August 1862, Stanton wrote Saxton quickly authorizing him to enroll 5,000 Black laborers in the Quartermaster's service. He set forth and stated:

In view of the small force under your command and the inability of the Government at the present time to increase it, in order to guard the plantations and settlements occupied by the United States from invasion and protect the inhabitants thereof from captivity and murder by the enemy, you are also authorized to arm, uniform, equip, and receive into the service of the United States such number of volunteers of African descent as you may deem expedient, not exceeding 5,000 and may detail officers to instruct them in military drill, discipline, and duty, and to command them.

The importance of these orders is that by them Negroes were mustered into the service of the United States by War Department authority rather than by some enterprising general officer acting on his own initiative.<sup>56</sup>

The soldiers that Saxton armed for defensive purposes would go on several minor raids to capture supplies. Captain Thomas W. Higginson who was selected by Saxton to command this regiment said his soldiers fought well when they encountered Confederate troops. He stated in his first report to the Secretary of War that no officer in his regiment doubted that the key to the successful prosecution of the war lay in the unlimited employment of Black troops.<sup>57</sup> These factors combined with the effects of war on the Northern economy, contributed significantly to the gradual acceptance of Negroes as combat soldiers.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Senate, Remarks of Senators Rice & Wilkinson in the United States Senate on the 9th and 10th of July, 1862 On the Bill to Employ Negroes to Labor, &c. in the United States Army, During the Southern Rebellion. Baltimore: Publishers, Booksellers, Printers and Stationers, 1862.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>3</sup>James M. Mcpherson, "Who Freed The Slaves," Reconstruction Vol. 2 No. 3 (1994): 35-36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Joe H. Mays, Black Americans and their Contribution toward Union Victory in the American Civil War (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>T. Harry Williams, "Lincoln Surrenders to the Radicals," Lincoln and Civil War Politics, ed. James A. Rawley (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1974), 36.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>McPherson, 36.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Howard C. Westwood, "Grant's Role in beginning Black Soldieriery," Illinois Historical Journal vol.79 (Autumn 1986): 197-199.

<sup>13</sup>Mays, 10.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup>Howard C. Westwood, Black Troops White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>22</sup>C. Peter Ripley, Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 33-34.

<sup>23</sup>Westwood, 42.

<sup>24</sup>Westwood, 41.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm; Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 63.

<sup>33</sup>Westwood, 45.

<sup>34</sup>Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), no. 1. vol. VI, 81,85-86,95,107.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>36</sup>Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the Civil War (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1969), 229; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, no. 2, vol 1, 15-23.

<sup>37</sup>Official Records Navies, Series 1, vol.XII, 353.

<sup>38</sup>Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro in the Union Navy," The Journal of Negro History vol.32 (April 1947): 191; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, no. 1, vol.XLIII, 430-433.

<sup>39</sup>Westwood, 57.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 66.

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<sup>56</sup>Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm; Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 80.

<sup>57</sup>Mays, 19.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FEDERAL POLICY CONCERNING THE NEGRO

Much of the policy formulation of the federal government prior to and during the Civil War can be traced to Abraham Lincoln. Frederick Douglass said it best in the late 1880s: "In all my interviews with Mr. Lincoln, I was impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race." But during an oration in 1876 honoring an unveiling of a statue commemorating Mr. Lincoln, Douglass felt he had to remind the Black people in attendance that:

Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices he was a white man. He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of the white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country.<sup>1</sup>

Lincoln was born in an impoverished white family in the then slave state of Kentucky; he grew up in the anti-negro environments of Indiana and Illinois. Many of his perceptions like many of ours are shaped by our environment. Lincoln's perception about the Negro race were also shaped during his upbringing. Lincoln was principally set against slavery where it existed, but he and his party were opposed to the possible expansion of it into the west.<sup>2</sup> An issue he would lightly tread in the early months of the Civil War. He denounced compromises to settle slave issues, but toyed with the idea of a waiting game to see if the South would come to its senses. Lincoln's inability to strike at the issue of slavery in the first eighteen months of the war was merely out of

deference to the racial sensitivity of the border states and out of deference to the North, which then was fighting to stop secession.

Now more than a year and a half into his presidency Lincoln had to face the fact that he had to move against slavery. This was, one of the largest tasks he would have to undertake, in deciding what to do with emancipated slaves once they were free coupled with developing a racial policy for the nation.<sup>3</sup> Actually, Lincoln had come up with some ideas earlier on what to do with Blacks if they were to be emancipated. He proposed to Congress and other state papers that he would emancipate the Blacks gradually and then colonize them somewhere outside the United States. Lincoln addressed these words to an unhappy delegation of Black leaders:

You and We are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffers very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffers from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side.<sup>4</sup>

"It is better for both," the president concluded, "to be separated."

Lincoln would later reverse his prospective through military developments and a fast changing political arena.

#### Republicans Decide on Policy

Until he took the oath of office as President Mr. Lincoln was silent on issues of slavery he considered crucial to maintaining the unity of the nation. He worked vigorously behind the scenes to shore up support in key states he thought would turn the tide against secession. In the meantime, Mr. Lincoln did not sit idly by and wait for things to happen. He studied the financial conditions of the present government, and scrutinized the attitude of the press; nothing preoccupied him more

than gathering the attitudes of the members of his party in Congress. They supplied him with the changing moods and subplots that were at work in Washington, and some of them very early in session informed him of the growing tendency to accept a compromise from the South.<sup>5</sup>

From the Lincoln election to his inauguration, the Republican Party tried to facilitate an expected Unionist reaction in the South, and to guard against any developments which might prevent a harmonious reunion. This was in no sense a policy of concession, for that would involve appeasing the South and thus strengthening the secessionist movement. It was believed in the North that the secessionists must be left free to destroy themselves by leading the cotton states into an untenable situation.<sup>6</sup> As more and more talk of secession erupted the Republican party became almost oblivious to it. They had reckoned it would wax, and they reckoned with equal confidence that it would wane. Their policy was embarked on a wait game now, almost with complete insouciance.<sup>7</sup>

Lincoln knew the success of Republican policy must depend on the maintenance of Federal authority in full vigor. But, at the same time, it also required that such authority be exercised with forbearance and tact, in order to avoid war, which would be ruinous to the cause of reunion.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, while upholding Federal claims and avoiding hostilities, so as to leave the way clean for reconstruction, it behooved the Federal government to keep the Border States voluntarily in the Union. So as long as they remained, the cotton states would feel a certain inadequacy and a kinship with the Unionist slave state that would draw them back to the Union. Additionally, some 300,000 potential



soldiers from Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware would be kept out of Confederate hands thereby keeping lines of communication (LOC's) to Washington D.C. secure. But if all the slave states succeeded the difficulties of reconstruction would be much worse.<sup>9</sup>

The Republican party responsibilities were multiple and urgent. If the policy of voluntary reconstruction were to be fulfilled at least three prerequisites must be satisfied; first, the Buchanan administration must be prevented from betraying the national strategy, and the Lincoln administration must be launched without disorder; second, armed conflict must be averted; and most important the Border States must be retained in the Union. The Republicans dedicated themselves in the first month of 1861 to these objectives.<sup>10</sup>

#### President Gathers Power through Policy

President Lincoln's policies coupled with the ever increasing demands of war, gradually gave way to the Lincoln administration's assumption of increased power. Nowhere is it more evident than the relationship between Lincoln and the governor's of the Northern states. When the call to war was final, Lincoln asked Congress on 4 July 1861, for at least 400,000 men and at least \$400,000,000, in order to make "this contest a short and decisive one."<sup>11</sup> Congress gave Lincoln the authority to accept 500,000 men, but only ratified a loan of only \$250,000,000; it also increased the tariff duties, provided for a direct tax of \$20,000,000, apportioned to all states and territories, and imposed an income tax, hoping from this legislation to get a revenue of about \$75,000,000 for the fiscal year.

The President also believed that his initial acts since Fort. Sumter fell and the call for 75,000 militia and the enactment of a blockade were just in looking at the situation for a quick end to what many thought would be a quick war. The call for three years troops and

three months militiamen and the increase of the regular Army and Navy were measures which, if not strictly legal Congress would soon ratify. He had deemed it necessary to authorize the commanding general to suspend the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* due to public safety and necessity. Different factions of the House and Senate would bicker and fight amongst themselves on the fine points of Lincoln's acts, especially concerning the writ of *habeas corpus*. Many believed the Constitution gave this authority solely to Congress. Lincoln was a smooth operator who knew how to win people over at the right time. He would win over many in Congress and the Senate and impress upon them the need to pass his proposals through and win this war quickly.<sup>12</sup>

The cabinet was beginning to see that Lincoln would be the master. "Executive skill and vigor are rare qualities," privately wrote Seward. "The President is the best of us."<sup>13</sup> This came from the man who many regarded as being the heart and soul of the Republican party and who many thought in the party should have had the job as President. Since the fourth of March the face of change swept over the minds of the politicians and statesmen of the nation. In the Senate were twelve Democrats and four Unionist from the border state, and of these one-half cooperated faithfully with the Republicans in the important measures for the vigorous prosecution of the war. The House was composed of 106 Republicans, 42 Democrats, and 28 Unionists; but on a resolution offered by McClernad, a Democrat, that the House pledge itself "to vote for any amount of money and any number of men which may be necessary to insure a speedy and effectual suppression of the rebellion," there were only five nays.<sup>14</sup> An impressive and unanimous amount of support shown by the House. Here Lincoln is accumulating the power he will need to eventually support his decisions to arm Negro troops, win the war and eventually rescue his reelection.

Since the governors were influential in getting Lincoln elected, they believed they were uniquely qualified to give the President advice in conducting affairs of the country. The Republican party had become powerful on the state and national level. A handful had also been elected governor and now they wanted war against the secessionist of the South. Lincoln turned that zest into his own weapon for power. He took action in the direction as they wanted but at his own pace. In doing so, he seized the initiative from the state political leaders. In the long run national decisions had to be made by national officers, and Lincoln did not shrink the obligation.<sup>15</sup>

Lincoln had additionally, overwhelmed the governors of the states who supported his election. State governors who traditionally wielded the power of their states and for the most part that of the Union, now found themselves helpless as to the power of the Presidency.<sup>16</sup>

The President was at a standstill in 1862 concerning the Civil War. The McClellan idea of a gentlemanly war was not working like men at the time had presumed. A more drastic action had to be taken to secure victory in the end. Charles Sumner, a prominent Massachusetts lawyer and Senator was a staunch abolitionist for ending the suffering of Negro slaves. He supported Lincoln in almost every endeavor he undertook. He understood Lincoln's reluctance on certain issues in dealing with the emancipation issue. He nevertheless kept the pressure on the President to emancipate.<sup>17</sup>

Sumner recognized the wisdom of not attacking slavery too soon, be he never believed that the Union and slavery could both be preserved. Now was the time to strike at the issue of emancipation. The Union needed manpower and the Negro was the most feasible way of continuing to wage war against the South and provide himself eventual freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Sumner felt that it was not safe to delay until the course of the war had educated the country up to emancipation, and that something should be done to create a public opinion upon which the President could lean. His opportunity came in an address to the State Republican Convention of Massachusetts, and his speech on 1 October 1861, was the first public demand for emancipation made by any responsible statesman. After dwelling on the suffering disasters caused by the Civil War, and pointing out that all these were borne to preserve slavery, he proceeded:

It is often said that war will make an end of slavery. This is probable. But it is surer still that the overthrow of slavery will make an end of the war. If I am correct in this averment, which I believe beyond question, then do reason, justice, and policy unite, each and all, in declaring that the war must be brought to bear directly on the grand conspirator and omnipresent enemy. Not to do so is to take upon ourselves all the weakness of slavery, while we leave to the rebels its boasted resources of military strength. . . . It is not necessary even, borrowing a familiar phrase, to carry the war into Africa. It will be enough if we carry Africa into the war.<sup>19</sup>

Sumner would continue to advocate the emancipation of slaves throughout the year of 1861 and into 1862. He was sure it was the most effective weapon against the Confederates to win the war. No one man was more responsible for the actions of a Congress against slavery than was Sumner. On 13 July 1862, Lincoln said to Secretary of State Seward and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles that emancipation was a military necessity, and on 22 July he submitted to his cabinet the draft of an proclamation declaring that slaves should be free on 1 January 1863, in states then in rebellion. Lincoln waited for a victory from his armies and after Antietam on 22 September 1863, he routed a preliminary copy of the emancipation proclamation. The President I believe was right in waiting, but he was able to strike when he did was largely due to Sumner and those who, with him, who had educated the people to approve the blow. The Republican Party was now a party of emancipation.<sup>20</sup>

Thaddeus Stevens, a prominent Congressman from Pennsylvania was as adamant about slavery as Sumner. He stated supporting the first Confiscation bill of July 1861, that slaves should be armed if the war continued. On the opening day of the next session of Congress, he introduced a resolution, declaring that slavery caused the rebellion:

That there could be no solid and permanent peace and union in the republic so long as slavery existed within it; that slaves were used by the rebels as essential means of supporting the war and that by laws of nations it was right to liberate the slaves of an enemy to weaken his power.<sup>21</sup>

Stevens resolution went on to say that:

That the President be requested to declare free, and to direct that all our generals and officers in command to order freedom to, all slaves who shall leave their masters or who shall aid in quelling this rebellion.<sup>22</sup>

Stevens was quick to grasp the concept that the war would not be won without the assistance of the Negro. He knew the Confederate army had just as many intelligent officers as the North, and that their climate, mountains and swamps would prove fatal to the Union army. He also knew that many Northern young men would opt to stay at home and till the soil and keep in motion the mechanical and manufacturing industries, but every Southern white man fit for the war could be spared for the Army without taking a single hand from the industrial pursuits. Stevens believed that we should let the slaves fight for their freedom. He saw it a "puerile inconsistency" that the North would be willing to kill the rebels in order to prevail, and not use the freedom of the slave as an instrument to win the war.<sup>23</sup> Sumner and Stevens are but two of many strong voiced proponents who advocated their desire to see the Negro armed and fighting for his freedom.

#### Lincoln's resolve is tested.

The preservation of the Union was the unavoidable official aim of the federal government, which was primarily in the hands of the

Republican party.<sup>24</sup> Through this Lincoln would address the issues of compromise, emancipation, and colonization in the early months of war. Lincoln initially avoided the antislavery issue, because of his innate fear of driving the border states over to the Confederacy. Yet it is unnecessary to reject the official Union theory of war aims to hold that the strategy for suppressing the rebellion in the south must rest upon a policy of emancipation.<sup>25</sup> The Lincoln administration knew that slavery was essential to the war effort of the South. It was argued that it could be legitimately destroyed under the war power of the government as a threat to its national security.

In 1862, Lincoln abandoned the border state policy of restraint toward slavery in favor of gradual, compensated, and immediate military emancipation. At the time, this was considered a radical change in the way that President Lincoln wanted to pursue the issue of restoring the Union. Although Lincoln had a way with the people and the members of the legislative branch, 1862 nevertheless proved to be a trying year. The war had been going on for almost a year. Northerners were becoming intolerant of the slavery issue due to the bloodshed and loss of loved ones. Northern armies had not had any real victories other than those out west away from the two centers of gravity Washington and Richmond. The North was pressuring the President to end the war any way he could. The South was hoping for a few more victories and possibly some form of a truce from the Union side. Lincoln had to decide now to move away from the idea of appeasing the South and hoping for their eventual return to the Union of the secession States. It seems clear now that while this change fulfilled distinct ideological tendencies in the Republican party, the principal catalyst for it came from military developments in the field.<sup>26</sup>

The Party looks at the Negro.

The question of where the issue of the Negro stood as far as the federal government was concerned can be traced back as far as General Butler in Virginia. He adopted the theory in 1861 that slaves used for insurrectionary or rebellious deeds could be confiscated as contrabands of war and whose services could be appropriated and turned in favor of Union efforts. The federal government adopted this policy introduced by General Butler in May of 1861. Although this policy did not cover or recognize the personal liberty and free status of escaped slaves it was nonetheless, pointed in the right direction toward enrollment of Blacks as combat troops.

When this contraband theory began to evolve in the field many commanders refused to receive escaped slaves in their lines, or otherwise permitted their recapture. Congress had to step in and establish an article of war prohibiting military and naval personnel from returning escaped slaves.<sup>27</sup> This article was passed in compliance with Lincoln's new change in policy. The Union was on the right track in depriving the Confederacy of much needed labor. As a side issue, this gave the Republican party an opportunity to speak for Negro freedom by arguing that their purpose was to prevent military officers from deciding questions of personal liberty outside their jurisdiction.<sup>28</sup>

The Republicans and the federal government went further in the policy to rid the South of manpower. Bills are introduced in the Thirty-seventh Congress to free the slaves of rebels. The bills, consistent with the contraband theory, are mainly aimed at using the black manpower for military and naval purposes rather than tackling the issue of freedom of former slaves. In August of 1861, Congress passes the first Confiscation Act after the trial run of Butler's contraband theory. It stated that if slaves were employed in military labor or

service in support of the rebellion, persons claiming their services forfeited their right to slave labor.<sup>29</sup> The Confiscation Act of 1861 thus deprived the enemy of slave labor but did not in express terms confer liberty on blacks released from service to rebel masters.<sup>30</sup>

Congress met again in the December of 1861, the continued failure and inactivity of Union arms made Republican lawmakers more willing to undertake the task of an aggressive antislavery policy. Congress stepped up the importance of introducing more emancipation and confiscation bills which declared unequivocally that slaves aiding the rebellion were now freedmen, state laws to the contrary were not withstanding.<sup>31</sup> Here again the federal government feels that slavery was an important factor in the Southern war economy. These proposals did not however, protect the personal freedom of the freed slaves. If a former master wanted to make claim to a slave he would only have to prove past loyalty to the Union in order to lay claim. This was intended as much to protect the interest of loyal masters as well as the freedom of emancipated slaves.<sup>32</sup>

Military expediency remained the controlling factor in the solution to the Southern war effort and that of the emancipation policy. The North's agenda was to bring the war to an end. The policy at the time would have to change to reflect this. Reducing the manpower in the South would help tremendously in achieving this. As victories continued in the west and more slaves poured into Union lines it depleted the South of much needed manpower. The North wanted an end to the bloodshed. Lincoln being bombarded from all sides on the issue of arming Negroes and introducing more numbers would have to decide on a new policy. There was a growing dissatisfaction in the North that white



boys were dyeing for the freedom of the Negro. Why not let the willing and able Negro fight? Lincoln would have to contend with this and in the end produce the Emancipation Proclamation and later the enlistment of Negro soldiers in 1863. From this, the government in limited ways began to recognize the need to protect the personal liberty of the slave. Initially the government looked at the idea of colonizing the freed slaves on abandoned southern plantations. This idea would require tremendous manpower in the form of federal guards to protect freed slaves from vengeful and non understanding whites.<sup>33</sup>

If President Abraham Lincoln was going to win this war and reunite the Union, the Negro would be an integral part of that strategy. Changing his prewar policies, would require all of Lincoln's magical powers to date.

On 22 July 1862, the day after Lincoln declined to approve Hunter's request to enlist Negroes, Francis Brockhurst Cutting, a New York lawyer and a rabid proslavery Democrat, called on Stanton. The Secretary told him that slavery, the cause of sectional troubles, must be wiped out in order to weaken the enemy and to rally the ever increasing number of antislavery people in the North to a more vigorous support of the war effort.<sup>34</sup>

To Stanton's surprise, Cutting agreed with him. This could very well be the turnaround in public opinion that Stanton and the administration were looking for. Stanton asked him if he would be willing to talk to Lincoln - - a free expression of opinion from a one time proslavery Democrat such as Cutting might go far toward convincing the President that loyal Northern Democrats were now more willing to support an antislavery program than was generally opposed.<sup>35</sup>

Cutting talked with Lincoln for two hours. He pointed out the desirability of emancipation as a deterrent to recognition of the

Confederacy by foreign governments, and the growing impatience of people of antislavery convictions, the group on which Lincoln would chiefly rely for support in winning the war. Lincoln urged the necessity of holding the border states in line. Cutting responded that they could never be relied on and were disloyal at heart; their Congressmen would not even accept the offer of compensated emancipation that Lincoln had been urging upon them almost from the beginning of the war.<sup>36</sup>

Lincoln met with his cabinet later that day and was impressed by Cutting's opinion on winning the war and the employment of Negro troops. This conversation with Cutting may have eventually weighed into Lincoln's decision to go ahead with the emancipation proclamation and the arming of Negro troops. Yet, Lincoln was not really ready to go ahead and completely emancipate.

Secretary Stanton favored issuing the proclamation at once. Secretary Chase thought it would be wiser to let the Generals organize and arm Negroes quietly, and proclaim emancipation in local areas. Secretary Seward favored enlisting Negro troops but argued strenuously against emancipation. He formulated his opinion based on his beliefs that the act would induce foreign nations to intervene in the war, because their cotton supply would be endangered. Lincoln should announce emancipation only when the war took a turn for the better, so that it might be heralded by a victory.<sup>37</sup>

It appears Lincoln was impressed by Seward's argument and decided to withhold the proclamation for a more auspicious time. With Lincoln reluctant to exercise emancipation and his authority granted by the Second Confiscation Act, Union commanders continued to follow their own predilections. Stanton having had his hands scorched on the Hunter case decided to keep his own counsel on the issue of Negro soldiers. He dealt with Generals and their geographic areas on a case by case basis.

He dealt with Butler in Louisiana, Fremont in Missouri, and Lane in Kansas. Each situation dealt with the issue of Negroes in arms and eventual employment.

The inability of the draft to secure more soldiers and the threat of conscription caused serious unrest in the North and only increased pressure for Lincoln to make a stand on emancipation.<sup>38</sup>

### Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 156-157.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 250.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>James Ford Rhodes, Lincoln and Civil War Politics, ed. James A. Rawley (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1974), 8.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 29.

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<sup>17</sup>Moorfield Storey, Charles Sumner: American Statesmen, ed. John T. Morse, Jr. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), 199.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 201-202.

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<sup>21</sup>Samuel W. McCall, Thadeus Stevens: American Statesman, ed. John T. Morse, Jr. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 212-213.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>24</sup>Herman Belz, A New Birth of Freedom (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Joe H. Mays, Black Americans and their Contributions toward Union Victory in the American Civil War, 1861-1865 (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 10.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>34</sup>Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Alford A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), 238.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 238.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 239.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapters of this thesis provided a brief background on the denial and acceptance of Black men as soldiers during the Civil War between 1861-1863. Furthermore, the thesis covered some of the factors that probably contributed to the enrollment of Negro troops. Lastly, the policy of the Lincoln administration was examined. Further analysis centered on what were the key factors in the decision to let the Negroes finally become combat soldiers.

One of the vexing issues of the American Civil War centered on the Confederacy's insistence on individual states rights-away from the strangulation of Federal Control. The South, in the meantime, maintained its lifestyle with slavery still intact.

The Civil War began without the assistance of the Negro as a combat soldier. The Negro would through the assistance of key figures in our history and the constant pursuit of his own beliefs fight in a war for his future freedom. Then and only then would he finally establish himself in good standing in society. The Black man would go on to be accepted by the Union Army and fight courageously and bravely for his chance at freedom and the liberties enjoyed by all Americans.

Research question number one asked: What were the social, political, and military reasons Black men could not fight as combat soldiers in the Civil War between 1861-1863? During the course of this research for the above question, the following points were noted.

1. The perception of the Black man by many was that of an animal. He was considered to have evolved from the ape, and therefore,

was incapable of skills requiring higher mental capacity. The white man, on the other hand, evolved from Adam and Eve and was considered the superior of the two. The North and South had varied opinions on the treatment and placement of the Negroes in the white society, but they were almost alike in their distaste for racial equality. Much of this distaste stemmed from prejudice, discrimination, and pure ignorance of a people they knew hardly anything about. Their skin color and the texture of their hair were both different from the white man and contributed tremendously to his nonacceptance into the white mainstream.

2. Politically, the idea of arming Black troops had far too many negative ramifications that outweighed the good ones. First, the politicians received votes from their constituents, so the feelings and votes of the people outweighed the concerns of the Negro. Secondly, the administration of Abraham Lincoln did not want to upset the balance of power established with the border states. Lincoln believed that the border states would side with the Confederate forces if a policy on arming the Blacks was made too soon. Lastly, the Lincoln administration feared that arming Black troops would vehemently upset Southern people still loyal to the North and accelerate the wrath of the South to fight harder. After President Lincoln officially introduced the Emancipation Proclamation Jefferson Davis said:

The President of the United States is exciting servile war within the Confederacy, slave soldiers and Federal commissioned officers serving with them should be turned over to the states of the South to be dealt with according to the laws of said states.<sup>1</sup>

This statement only confirmed Lincoln's suspicions and knowledge of the South and their feelings toward arming Blacks.

3. The Union Navy saw no problem in utilizing the talents of the Negro to fight in the Civil War. With the refusal of whites to serve, the Black man was the alternative. The Union Army was a

different story altogether. Like many of its civilian counterparts, the Army did not like the idea of arming Blacks. White soldiers raised in an era where the Negro was considered a piece of property could not fathom the idea of having him serve along side. The general public also had problems accepting the idea of armed Black men. To them soldiering was a sacred occupation not to be degraded by arming Negroes. Secondly, there was a fear of Blacks becoming officers and one day commanding white troops.

The second research question asked: What were the reasons behind the final admittance and enrollment of Black men in 1863? The thesis research points to the following factors. There are several key factors that had major impacts toward the Negroes acceptance as combat soldiers. Events happening on the battlefield and a changing federal policy on what role the Negro would eventually play in this war are probably events that produced the most impact. During the course of my research the following points are noted:

1. In 1862 President Lincoln began his second year in the presidency. The radicals, called Jacobins, demanded emancipation. The abolitionists also demanded the end of slavery and the ruling of emancipation. Together they provide a one two punch of continual pressuring on the administration to give in to their demands. Lincoln, the moderate of his party played a waiting game and subsequently, made his decisions after listening to all sides presented by the Senate, Congress, and his cabinet.

2. Out west the issues of General Fremont in Missouri and General Lane in Kansas drew some of the initial attention of arming Negroes into the public's eye. General Lane first drew fire from the administration by declaring marshal law and confiscating property and



slaves in August of 1861. He would be replaced by General Halleck. In the summer of 1862, General Lane formed regiments of fugitives from Missouri and free Blacks from the North. Lane's troops would encounter the Confederates on many occasions, although they would not be officially recognized until 1863. Since Lane's campaigns were out west and away from the capitol of Washington, D.C., he probably drew less attention to himself and was therefore, able to continue fighting with his men. Here along with Saxton's men fighting in the Carolinas, we have some of the first examples of armed Blacks fighting and posing no threat to society.

3. General David Hunter, a staunch abolitionist who was stationed in the Carolinas and lower Georgia, provided fireworks for the Lincoln administration to contend with. Hunter had ambitions of retaking Fort Sumter but desperately needed troops to conduct the operation. He sought a solution in the abandoned slaves within the nearby plantations. Hunter boldly organized troops and called for arms without the consent of the federal government. He also declared marshal law in the area under his jurisdiction and pronounced all slaves as free. This did not sit well with the Lincoln administration, who revoked Hunter's declaration and finally replaced him with a more politically correct person in the form of General Saxton. In August of 1862, General Saxton would eventually gather the support of Lincoln in arming Negroes in the area for defense of the plantations. Saxton's troops under the command Of General Thomas Higginson, incurred several successful skirmishes with the Confederates. Although not officially recognized, Saxton's troops become the first sanctioned armed regiment implemented by the government.<sup>2</sup>

4. General Butler, during the Louisiana campaign wrestled with the idea of whether or not to use Black troops to confront the enemy. He initially rejected the services of the "Regiment of Native Guards," but the necessity of manpower and the unavailability of replacement troops required him to incorporate the Black militia of Louisiana into his own troops. The addition of these troops helped stave off an attempt by Confederate forces to retake the city of New Orleans. General Butler undertook these steps knowing full well the feelings of the townspeople towards such an unprecedented step.

5. General Ulysses S. Grant would also put the burden on the Lincoln administration. He would incur tremendous problems as he racked up victories in campaigns out west. Fugitive slaves poured into Union lines by the thousands causing tremendous logistics problems. Grant would eventually put the Negroes to work conducting odd jobs and providing the majority of the manual labor. This would enable Grant to put more of his troops in the field while providing security for his interior lines of communication. This influx of manpower for Grant was a huge surplus for the North, not only are the Negroes on the North's side but they are taken away from the South's ability to wage war. Here again we have Negroes in action with no disturbing after effects to discredit their involvement in the war.

5. Perhaps one of the true turning points in the policy of the Lincoln administration concerning Blacks and the emancipation issue was Lincoln's conversation with Francis Brockhurst Cutting, a New York lawyer and former die hard proslavery Democrat. The conversation from Cutting gave Lincoln an excellent insight into the Northern Democrats growing dissatisfaction with the war. They favored emancipation as a deterrent for the Confederacy not to be recognized by foreign governments. On the issue of the border states, Cutting stated they

could not be relied upon and were generally disloyal to the Union. He further stated the Congressmen from the border states would never accept Lincoln's plan of gradual compensated emancipation. From here on Lincoln would move swiftly on the issue of emancipation and forever change the plight of Negro slaves and freedmen.

Still the overriding issue of military necessity of the Negro would come into play time and time again. Prejudice and discrimination had to be put aside in favor of victory. As the reports of Union dead poured back into homes of the Union, more and more Northerners became disillusioned with the war. Even the Northern Democrats had enough of this terrible and seemingly never ending war. The Black man wanted to fight and he impressed this upon the administration often. If Lincoln was to win and make an impact for himself and his party, he had to augment additional military manpower in the form of Negro combat soldiers. Lincoln did this and won the war, freeing the Negro and forever changing politics in the process.

#### Areas of Future Study

The accomplishment of Negroes did not stop after they were officially recognized and accepted as combat soldiers. Their heroic efforts continued well on until the Civil War's end. Their accomplishments need to be researched and the facts brought to public view so the historical facts can be put in the proper perspective. We are now aware that many facts were reported inaccurately or not at all. The exploits of Negroes were sometimes considered trivial compared to the same feats performed by their white counterparts. Additional documentation of the heroics and courage displayed by Negro combat troops other than the 54th Massachusetts regiment needs to be conducted to refocus our perspective on what really happened to our troops once they were armed.

Another area that merits further research is the "Native Guards" of the Louisiana State militia. This all Black militia was unique by its very existence in a southern state. The significant political and social attitudes that lead to its acceptance by the whites of Louisiana could provide a key understanding of Southern life in that state.

The political and social aspects of recruitment and the effect it had on Negroes after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation deserves closer academic scrutiny. What social and political processes were related to their enlistment? For example, the number of casualties to Black troop units as opposed to white troop units might be analyzed to determine if the Black troops were assigned more rigorous/dangerous assignments. What was the perception of the Black in the military? Did they hope to attain a better standard of living? Was the advancement of enlisted black soldiers the same as whites? Were there opportunities for a select few to become officers?

Finally, what were the difficulties that kept the United States Army from desegregating much sooner than the start of the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. From this research one could begin to determine the mindset of the Army after the Civil War and if they considered the Black man tactically inferior to the white man. One could also use this research to determine what impact the methods and procedures used to form a Black unit had on its performance and how it would be judged against similar white units.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>J. G. Randall and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972), 394.

<sup>2</sup>Howard C. Westwood, Black Troops White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 37.

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